

Message Text

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SUBJ: SRI LANKAN REACTION TO INDIAN ELECTION RESULTS

1. SUMMARY. JANATA PARTY'S STUNNING VICTORY IN INDIA HAS CAUGHT SRI LANKA BY SURPRISE AND HAS PLEASED OPPOSITION LEADERS WHO SEE PARALLELS IN THE POSITIONS OF MRS. GANDHI AND MRS. BANDARANAIKE, NOT TO MENTION SANJAY AND ANURA BANDARANAIKE. ALTHOUGH PM BANDARANAIKE HAS MADE NO STATEMENT ON ELECTIONS, SHE HAS HAD CLOSE RELATIONS WITH MRS. GANDHI. INDIAN PUBLIC'S REACTION TO ABUSES OF EMERGENCY POWERS WILL BE FURTHER DETERRENT TO THOSE WITHIN GOVERNMENT WHO WOULD LIKE TO DELAY GENERAL ELECTIONS DUE HERE BY SEPTEMBER 1977. THERE WAS ALSO INTEREST HERE IN ROUT OF DMK IN TAMIL NADU BECAUSE OF PRESENCE OF LARGE NUMBERS OF ETHNIC TAMILS IN SRI LANKA. END SUMMARY.

2. JANATA'S ELECTORAL VICTORY IN INDIA HAS TAKEN PEOPLE AND POLITICIANS OF SRI LANKA BY SURPRISE. AS COUNTRY WHICH TAKES ITS CULTURAL TRADITIONS AND MUCH OF ITS HISTORY FROM THE COLOSSUS OF THE NORTH, SRI LANKA WAS QUICK TO DRAW CONCLUSIONS FROM PERCEIVED PARALLELS BETWEEN INDIA AND HERE. THE TWO WOMEN
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PRIME MINISTERS WITH AMBITIOUS AND SOMETIMES-ABRASIVE SONS HAVE HAD CLOSE RELATIONS WITH EACH OTHER IN THEIR YEARS OF POWER; WHEN THE ALLAHABAD HIGH COURT CASE WENT AGAINST MRS. GANDHI IN 1975, MRS. BANDARANAIKE WAS QUICK TO CONVEY HER "SHOCK AND CONCERN" AT THE DECISION. SHE HAS NOT SO FAR MADE A PUBLIC STATEMENT ON THE INDIAN ELECTION RESULTS BUT SHE CANNOT BUT REGRET THE LOSS OF A FRIEND WHOM SHE HAS PRAISED IN THE PAST

FOR LEADING INDIA ON THE ROAD TO ECONOMIC PROGRESS. ON THE BILATERAL RELATIONS SIDE, A NEW AND UNKNOWN JANATA GOVERNMENT MAY BE LESS EASY TO DEAL WITH THAN MRS. GANDHI'S GOVERNMENT, WHICH SETTLED THE MAJOR ISSUES BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES WITH A CERTAIN GENEROUS SENSE OF NOBLESSE OBLIGE.

3. OPPOSITION LEADERS HERE GREETED THE ELECTION NEWS WITH GLEE. THE UNITED NATIONAL PARTY (UNP) DAILY REPORTED THAT THIS "VICTORY FOR DEMOCRACY" WILL "GREATLY AFFECT THE SRI LANKA LEADERS WHO FOLLOWED INDIRA'S POLICIES." UNP LEADER J.R. JAYEWARDENE WAS QUOTED AS CREDITING THE DEFEAT TO THE PEOPLE'S RESPONSE TO EMERGENCY RULE AND ADDING THAT "THIS SHOULD BE A GOOD EXAMPLE TO SRI LANKA TOO". (SRI LANKA WAS UNDER EMERGENCY FROM MARCH 1971 UNTIL FEBRUARY 1977.)

4. LANKA SAMA SAMAJA PARTY (LSSP) LEADER N.M. PERERA PRE-DICTED POINTEDLY THAT "THOSE WHO IMITATE INDIRA WILL HAVE TO FACE THE SAME CONSEQUENCES (WHEN THEY COME BEFORE THE PEOPLE)". AN LSSP SINHALA-LANGUAGE DAILY'S EDITORIAL ADDED THAT "CERTAIN HAUGHTY LEADERS IN OUR COUNTRY TOO DID NOT HESITATE TO PRAISE (THE EMERGENCY) AS INDIRA'S COURAGEOUS STEP. THEREFORE THEY DECIDED TO ACT LIKE INDIRA." COMMUNIST PARTY REACTION, AS EXPRESSED IN THE UNUSUALLY OBJECTIVE REPORTING OF ITS DAILY PAPER, WAS MORE MUTED. ALTHOUGHT PLAYING UP THE NEWS THAT MOTHER AND SON WERE DEFEATED, THE PAPER DID NOT EDITORIALIZE ON THE DEFEAT OF CONGRESS, WHOSE TIES WITH THE SOVIET UNION ARE WELL KNOWN HERE.

5. ANURA BANDARANAIKE IN PAST MONTHS HAS NOT DISAVOWED THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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COMMON COMPARISON BETWEEN HIS SITUATION AND THAT OF SANJAY GANDHI. ON A TRIP TO INDIA, HE APPEARED ON THE SAME PLATFORM WITH SANJAY AND CLEARLY HAS SIMILAR POLITICAL AMBITIONS. TWO WEEKS AGO, HE HAD ANNOUNCED THAT HE WOULD BE CONTESTING THE PRESUMABLY SAFE CONSTITUENCY OF NUWARA ELIYA AT THIS SUMMER'S ELECTIONS. NOW SANJAY'S IGNOMINY HAS APPARENTLY BACKFIRED ON ANURA, WHO HAS ALREADY BEEN THE BUTT OF AT LEAST ONE SNIDE CARTOON IN OPPOSITION PRESS.

6. AMONG TAMILS OF SRI LANKA (ABOUT 20 PERCENT OF POPULATION), THE NEWS FROM TAMIL NADU OF THE ROUT OF THE DMK SHARED THE SPOTLIGHT WITH MRS. GANDHI'S DEFEAT. THE TAMIL UNITED LIBERATION FRONT (TULF) LAST YEAR FORMALLY ADDED TO ITS LIST OF GOALS THE EVENTUAL SECESSION OF THE TAMIL AREAS FROM SRI LANKA. THUS IT IS MORE OPENLY SEPARATIST THAN THE DMK, ANOTHER ETHNIC TAMIL PARTY, IS IN INDIA. TAMIL POLITICIANS HERE ATTRIBUTE THE DMK DEFEAT TO THE RAMPANT CORRUPTION OF THE KARUNANIDHI GOVERNMENT AS REVEALED IN RECENT MONTHS. DURING DMK RULE, TULF EXTREMISTS SAW INDIA AS A CONGENIAL PLACE OF EXILE WHEN

GSL SECURITY FORCES WERE CRACKING DOWN. THAT EASY CONVENIENT REFUGE ENDED WITH THE IMPOSITION OF PRESIDENT'S RULE IN TAMIL NADU AND NOW PERHAPS MORE PERMANENTLY WITH THE ECLIPSE OF THE DMK.

7. COMMENT: PARALLELS ARE NOT AS OBVIOUS AS THEY SEEM. FIRST, THE RULING PARTY HERE NOW LOOKS TO BE THE UNDERDOG IN THE COMING ELECTIONS. THE SLFP HAS AN UPHILL FIGHT IF IT IS TO RETURN; HOWEVER, IT IS NOT BURDENED BY THE SORT OF FLAGRANT ABUSES OF POWER THAT APPEAR TO HAVE ANGERED THE INDIAN PUBLIC. SECOND, AS FAR AS POLITICAL PROTEGES GO, ANURA IS NOT REALLY MRS. BANDARANAIKE'S SANJAY. HER MACHIAVELLIAN COUSIN-BY-MARRIAGE, FELIX BANDARANAIKE, BETTER FITS THE BILL. INCREDIBLY ABRASIVE, THE FINANCE MINISTER HAS BEEN THE LIGHTNING ROD FOR MUCH OF THE CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT. FIRST NECKNAMED SATAN, HE HAS SINCE BEEN CONDEMNED AS THE "INVISIBLE GOVERNMENT", A PHRASE COINED BY RESIGNED INDUSTRIES MINISTER T.B. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SUBASINGHE. EVEN HERE, THOUGH, THE DISLIKE OF HIS MACHINATIONS IS MOSTLY AMONG THE POLITICANS AND COLOMBO INTELLIGENTSIA, AND HIS PERSONAL DEFEAT AT AN ELECTION NOW APPEARS UNLIKELY.

8. ONE CAUTIONING LESSON THE INDIAN ELECTION RESULT MAY HAVE FOR THE GOVERNMENT HERE IS THE ULTIMATE DANGER OF RIDING ROUGHSHOD OVER THE OPPOSITION. IT IS GENERALLY CONCEDED THAT THE PM INTENDS TO HOLD ELECTIONS AS SCHEDULED BUT ANY ONE STILL ADVISING HER TO THE CONTRARY MAY BE DETERRED BY THE DEBACLE IN INDIA.

9. ON THE ANURA-SANJAY COMPARISON, IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT SANJAY RAN AND LOST IN A SINGLE MEMBER CONSTITUENCY. ANURA IS SLATED TO BE THE SOLE SLFP CANDIDATE IN A THREE-MEMBER CONSTITUENCY IN WHICH EACH VOTER MAY VOTE THREE TIMES FOR SAME CANDIDATE IF HE CHOOSES. IT IS ASSUMED THAT ONE SEAT WILL GO TO ANURA, ONE TO UNP INCUMBENT GAMINI DISSANAYAKE, AND THE THIRD TO A CANDIDATE REPRESENTING THE TAMIL ESTATE WORKERS, PROBABLY S. THONDAMAN. THUS ANURA'S CHANCES APPEAR FAR BETTER THAN WERE SANJAY'S. REED

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